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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR INR/EU SCOTT EDELMAN

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SUBJECT: CHOD OZKOK'S SELF-IMAGE

Classified By: Political Military Counselor Timothy A. Betts for reason  
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) A flag officer in the Turkish General Staff (TGS) recently passed to us a Turkish translation of an article on TGS Chief GEN Hilmi Ozkok that ran in an Egyptian publication during Ozkok's late February visit to Cairo. Our contact reported that Ozkok thought this article portrayed him much more accurately than anything written in Turkey. Ozkok passed it out to his senior staff. Our contact said that he gave it to everyone in his department. The article describes Ozkok as a strong, pro-reform general who is neither afraid to stand up to the US (on Iraq and Iran) nor to weather criticism within his own ranks. It provides a glimpse as to how Turkey's senior-most military officer sees himself.

2. (SBU) The following is an informal Embassy translation of the Turkish translation of an Al Ahram article about General Ozkok:

Ozkok... Reformist not Accepting Politicization of Turkish Army  
Al Ahram, 02/21, by Abdulhalim Gazali

Chief of TGS General Hilmi Ozkok, who will visit Egypt today, seems to be very different from his Turkish counterparts. Ozkok has a rational, realist, peaceful personality far from being haughty or a show-off. Ozkok, who is bound to democracy, believes that the army should stay away from political life as long as principles of the Turkish Republic - established by the leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk based on secularism - are not threatened. In this respect, General Ozkok has supported huge reforms in the last 2 years within the context of Turkey's EU accession process. He has given the impression that the army would keep the country's interests above considerations like its dissatisfaction with some tendencies of the governing Islamic AKP. He has also established a positive synergy despite overt disputes between state institutions and the government. Some believed that the army would either reject or hinder the political reforms. However, Ozkok even openly supported reform programs restricting the government's - and the military's - authority over the public. This restriction is reflected in the reduction of the representation of the Turkish Army at the National Security Council (MGK).

Other relevant changes include the following: assignment of a civilian head of the MGK for the first time over the history, eliminating confidentiality and adopting transparency, and letting Turkish and foreign media cover these changes.

Press conferences organized by army commanders, whose names do not cause fear anymore, were allowed to be broadcast as live programs in a country that has experienced military coups within the last 40 years. The widespread image of having generals above the law and the state institutions does not exist anymore. This is a very important fact from a psychological and social point of view. In this respect, Ozkok accepted scrutiny of the army budget - the budget of an entity that was as strong as a government within a government -- by the legislative body and court.

Probably Ozkok's most important message since he was assigned as the Chief of the TGS was his declaration that the era of military coups was over. He proved this idea by evading conflicts with the government a few times. It is already clear that Ozkok is quite different from other generals and commanders about whom everyone has had a common idea for many years. As a matter of fact, Ozkok did not hesitate to apologize for the attempt by the Jandarma, a security organization, to commit espionage against Turkish and foreign individuals. The General, who is known for his honesty and loyalty, launched a struggle against corruption, which is something not to forget. The names of dozens of military officers and generals were mentioned in the corruption cases. One of these persons was previously the Naval Forces Commander who was charged with abusing his position for personal interest. Because trying a retired Naval Forces Commander overtly could not be even imagined until recently,

some Turkish writers took courage from the situation and started pressing the government to follow the army's lead by lifting the immunity of parliamentarians, many of whom have been accused of corruption. Ozkok is also in favor of peace and good relations with neighboring countries. Despite being against using force to solve disagreements and unnecessarily threatening the use of force and increasing tension, Ozkok is attentive to resisting any type of threat to Turkey's national interests.

In this respect, while Ozkok supported Turkish-Syrian relations and cooperation with other Arab countries in any field, he suggested that the US not launch a war against Iraq. For this reason, the Turkish Army refused to show a clear attitude on the request for deployment of tens of thousands of American troops through Turkish territory to open the Northern Front during the war against the Saddam regime. Therefore this issue was left to the decision of the government and the parliament, which irritated the Bush Administration. The Turkish parliament, with an unforgettable historical decision, rejected the US request. From the beginning Ozkok has been showing an attitude that the army has only an implementing role for political decisions with no right for decision-making in the political process within the context of respect to constitution. A few months after the war was launched, American Forces arrested a group of Turkish military officers on the grounds that they were preparing for an assassination attempt against Kurdish Governor of Kirkuk Abdurrahman Mustafa. Ozkok expressed his anger against the US by declaring that confidence in the relationship between the two allies was badly affected.

During the period when tensions between the US and Iran on the latter's nuclear program were increasing, Ozkok warned the US about the dangers of a military intervention against Iran while expressing his concern about the possibility Iran's producing nuclear weapons. He called on all countries in the region, including Israel, to sign agreements against WMD. About the Cyprus issue, Ozkok's attitude not to accept interfering with the government to deter its support of the Annan Plan despite the Turkish Military's reservations on some articles of the plan, had surprised many people. As a result of this, Ankara was not labeled the uncompromising party for the first time in the history of this issue. After the Turkish Cypriots voted in favor of the Annan Plan in last April's referendum, Ankara - having 30,000 troops in Northern Cyprus - proved that it had put aside its position of supporting a fait accompli that it had been accused of for many years. This plan foresees withdrawal of these troops from the island gradually. During the Ozkok period, which began when he was assigned on 08/28/2002, the popularity of the Turkish military has increased, as the military is at the top of the list of trusted institutions in Turkey, i.e. presidential office, government, parliament and judiciary. The Turkish military has also launched a reconstruction process. It is obvious that Ozkok, who lived in Europe while serving at NATO Headquarters, will carry on with his reformist method in the army and will support the huge changes Turkey is going through within the framework of its accession to EU membership. It seems that Ozkok will follow up his current policy despite the fact that the EU touches upon sensitive issues like separating the military from politics and public life. The EU is not aware of the historical role of the military in protecting the Republic, Turkey's independence and territorial integrity in the face of many threats including the Kurdish issue. Therefore, it is expected that Ozkok will choose mid-way solutions, allowing the military to protect its position and to pull out from politicization. It is believed that the first hot issue the Turkish Army will have to face is the current situation in Iraq, because Turkey has serious concern that the Kurds are inclined to separate from Iraq. In such a case, it will be very difficult for Turkey to accept it. It is understood that the experienced and sapient Ozkok has the power to lead his army both in Turkey and outside the country through mine fields as well, because he is a very open-minded general, far from being swept away by the flood of heroism, which has gotten the Turkish military into trouble. Using force and conflict, methods that were commonly used by the Turkish Army in the past, causes a tense atmosphere that is difficult to control and brings criticism; while calm and quiet solutions would bring benefit to Turkey, as they do elsewhere.

End Text.  
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